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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR



28 AUG 1972

Executive Registry

72-46747

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger  
Assistant to the President for  
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Report on the Vietnam Situation by the

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My impression after conversations with Vietnamese and colleagues in the diplomatic corps, including representatives of the Indochinese liberation movements, is that the cautious optimism regarding developments over the short run is founded on the North Vietnamese side's conviction that Nixon is preparing a new peace initiative to take place well before the Presidential Election. Such an initiative would, according to North Vietnamese thinking, be motivated by the President's growing realization that Vietnamization has failed and that he needs to end the war before his policies suffer complete collapse. The Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) side bases a similar cautious optimism on the rapidly changing political conditions in South Vietnam. An Quang--the Buddhists' latest

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initiative together with the signs of growing unity within the opposition leadership are interpreted as positive and important changes in South Vietnam's political life.

According to some observers the Vietnamese would never show such optimism--even though cautious and restrained if they had not already received some indication from the other side that Washington would shortly be prepared to reassess its negotiation conditions and meet Hanoi/PRG's demands regarding changes in political power in Saigon. Those here who believe that a meaningful negotiation dialogue will begin, or has already begun, between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger like to talk about a North Vietnamese willingness to meet Washington halfway and clear the way for an honorable American retreat if the Americans are serious in their proposals.

It is confirmed by the Cambodian Ambassador here, among others, that Hanoi's wish for peace is real and seriously meant. The Cambodian adds that the Cambodian side warned the North Vietnamese not to go too fast in their search for peace and above all not to accept a wrong solution, because a lasting peace all over Indochina could be achieved with greater patience.

The weak point in the North Vietnamese optimism seems to be Hanoi's conviction that Nixon, in order to be reelected, has to undertake something new in the Vietnam question before the election, but from what can be seen here Nixon does not appear to be too worried by the Vietnam issue as the situation is now developing. And the American President could, in the present logic of the war, just as well choose a considerable further escalation of military actions against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with increased bombing against cities primarily as a means of pressure in his attempts to achieve peace on his own conditions if developments cause him to

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believe this is necessary. It appears, however, that even if they sometimes talk about such a possibility in Hanoi, they prefer deep inside not to believe this, and have instead chosen to believe that Nixon will offer Hanoi conditions which will make real negotiations possible before the Presidential Elections.

Hanoi's and PRG's demands as they are formulated here give an impression of restraint and now appear to represent the minimum aims. Regarding the question of political power in Saigon, it appears that during a given transition period they would be able to consider accepting seriously intended, renewed cooperation with certain elements of the present Thieu Government. Even the issue of Thieu's person seems to have faded somewhat into the background as far as the personality question in Saigon is concerned.

This soft line, however, must not be confused with a change in Hanoi/PRG's negotiation conditions-- they say that only after a concession by the other side would they be willing to negotiate in accordance with the above. Should Nixon insist on keeping to his conditions of the 8th of May, then one here considers that the preconditions for a constructive dialogue are missing. In that case there is nothing left except to let the weapons speak. The head of the Political Department who yesterday dined at the Embassy made no secret, for his part, of the fact that unpleasant surprises for the Americans could be expected if the hopes given to the North Vietnamese by the Americans are not fulfilled. Mai Van Bo explained at the same time that both Hanoi and Washington knew exactly where each stood in the negotiations. This knowledge was said to be based on both sides' appreciation of the actual power situation and relationships in South Vietnam just now. This was how the head of the Political Department justified North Vietnamese hopes for an early break in the deadlock in Paris.

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In this connection it should be added that the American Ambassador Bunker told the French Consul General in Saigon that the American military command expected a big new offensive against Quang Tri and Hue during the last weeks of August, or the beginning of September. According to Bunker the North Vietnamese disposed over quite sufficient resources for this effort and, according to him, the concentration of forces had already begun in the adjoining areas. As a personal comment on this I want to add that in my conversations with the Vietnamese since my return I have not found any support for the prevailing U.S. interpretation that Hanoi is prepared for, or had perhaps already begun, a fundamental reassessment of its positions in light of the American escalation of the air war in the DRV. On the contrary, it seems to be that unity and the resolve to go on with the war if the other side does not choose to break the deadlock is more apparent than ever. All speculation to the contrary seems to reflect wishful thinking.

2. The above information has been given no dissemination in the field. It is being sent exclusively to you in Washington.

Richard Helms

Richard Helms  
Director

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Signature Recommended:

28 AUG 1972

A/ Deputy Director for Plans

Date

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